

Disordered Sex Differentiation

DSD has superceded 'intersex' in describing genital anomalies in childhood

DSD results from hormonal imbalances due to (i) abnormal genetic status, (ii) enzyme defects, or (iii) end-organ insensitivity to circulating hormones

Commonest causes are congenital adrenal hyperplasia (#1) and mixed gonadal dysgenesis (#2)

True hermaphrodites = those with co-existent ovarian and testicular tissue

Children with ambiguous genitalia should be investigated and followed up by a specialised multi-disciplinary team. Birth registration and naming of child should be delayed until investigation complete in order that careful consideration be made to gender assignment.

DSD classification

A. Abnormal gonadal differentiation

Klinefelter's syndrome (& mosaics)

Turner's syndrome (& mosaics)

Mixed gonadal dysgenesis

46 XX male

46, XX/46,XY true hermaphrodites

B. Virilisation of 46XX female

Congenital adrenal hyperplasia (& subtypes)

Maternal androgens

C. Inadequate virilisation of 46XY male

Inadequate MIS activity (deficiency or insensitivity)

Failed production of T

Failed production of DHT

Insensitivity to circulating T

Gonadal dysgenesis

Failed gonadal development, usually due to absent or disordered genetic material

Typically occurs during meiosis (#1 or #2) due to non-dysjunction. Failure of separation leads to one gamete with 22 chromosomes and one with 24. Explains genesis of pure 45 X and 47 XXY karyotypes. Mosaicism results from non-dysjunction during mitosis at blastocyst stage. NB. Dysgenetic gonads at significant risk of subsequent malignancy.

(i) **Mixed gonadal dysgenesis**

Typically 45X/46XY mosaicism

Streak gonad one side, testis (often UDT) on other with corresponding mullerian and wolffian ducts

Phallic enlargement but with uterus and vagina

Usually picked up during investigation for UDT

Increased risk of gonadal tumours, more commonly involving testis, (gonadoblastoma and dysgerminoma)

Increased risk of Wilm's tumour - mixed gonadal dysgenesis and Wilm's tumour commonly associated with Denys-Drash syndrome (triad of ambiguous genitalia, WT and glomerulonephritis)

(ii) Turner's syndrome

Incidence 1:2500

45 X female (occasionally 45X/46XX mosaicism; rarely 45X/46XY but important as high risk of virilisation and gonadoblastoma)
 Female sex, failure of secondary sexual differentiation, streak ovaries and primary amenorrhoea
 Somatic abnormalities include short stature, webbed neck, increased carrying angle, widespread nipples and short fourth metacarpal
 Associated congenital abnormalities include coarctation of aorta, bicuspid aortic valve, horseshoe kidney, duplication or renal agenesis. Multiple renal arteries in 90%
 Variant of Turner's known as 46 XX pure gonadal dysgenesis has streak ovaries without other stigmata of Turner's.

Management

Excision of streak gonad in those with Y chromosome material
 Surveillance for cardiovascular and renal abnormalities

(iii) Klinefelter's syndrome

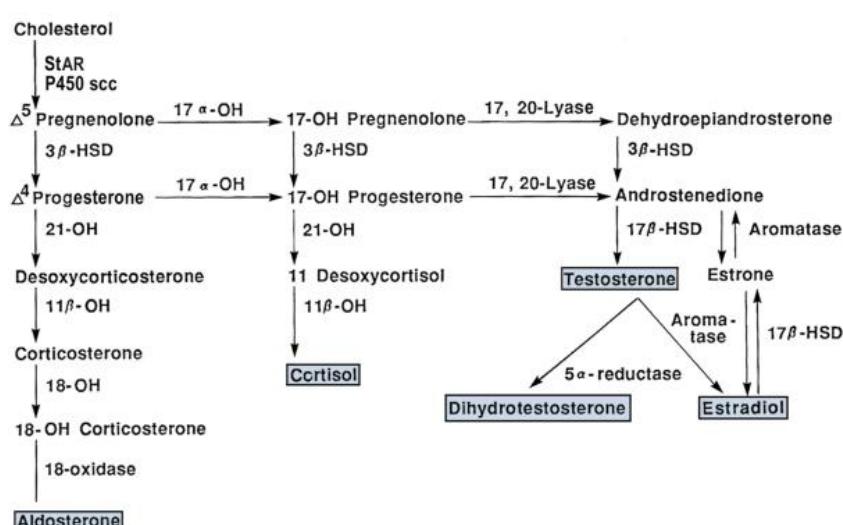
Incidence 1:1000 male births
 47 XXY (occasionally 48XXXX, 49XXXX or 46XY/47XXY mosaicism)
 Occasionally translocation of SRY gene onto an X chromosome results in 46 XX maleness syndrome – very similar to Klinefelters
 Gynaecomastia, female fat distribution, absent facial hair (but often pubic and axillary hair), small firm testes, azoospermia and elevated FSH/LH.
 Testosterone low in 50%; occasionally fertile
 Phenotype more pronounced proportional to no. of X chromosomes.
 Presence of sperm suggests mosaicism
 8x increased risk of breast cancer than normal males; also increased risk of Leydig and Sertoli cell tumours

Management

Careful T replacement
 Reduction mammoplasty if necessary
 Surveillance for breast and testicular malignancy

(iv) True hermaphroditism

46XX (50%), 46XY and 46XX/46XY mosaics remaining 50%
 Possess separate gonads or ovotestis



Virilisation of 46XX female

Virilisation of 46 XX female due either to fetal androgen (CAH) or XS maternal androgens (androgen-secreting tumours of ovary or adrenal, maternal treatment with exogenous progestogens)

Congenital adrenal hyperplasia

Responsible for 90% of causes of ambiguous genitalia

Only life-threatening cause - due to severe hyponatraemia

21-hydroxylase deficiency >> 11-beta hydroxylase deficiency > 3-beta hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase deficiency (3B-HSD) > aromatase deficiency

All associated with ACTH-stimulated production of adrenal precursors

(i) 21-hydroxylase deficiency

90% cases of CAH

Incidence 1:15000

Autosomal recessive

Mutation of 21-hydroxylase gene on chromosome 6

50% salt-losers

Diagnosis = elevated 17-OH-progesterone

Management

Immediate Mx

IV access

Bloods for U+E*, 17-OH-Prog, and karyotype

Resuscitation with IV saline

USS to identify gonads

* NB. U+E for 1st 24 hours reflect maternal levels – become hyponatraemic after 24 hours. Therefore do on second day.

Longer-term Mx

Glucocorticoid and mineralocorticoid replacement

Female gender assignment

Feminising genitoplasty

If pre-natal diagnosis considered in affected families, DXM given to mother from 9th to 17th week aimed at suppressing pituitary-adrenal axis

(ii) 11-beta hydroxylase deficiency

Rare

Accumulation of 11-desoxycortisol (more mineralocorticoid action)

Salt retention and potassium loss, with resultant hypertension

Severe virilisation

(iii) 3-beta HSD deficiency

Mild virilisation but severe hyponatraemia

Accumulation of DHEA and 17-OH pregnenolone

Inadequate virilisation of 46XY male

(i) MIS deficiency or insensitivity

Normal testis differentiation with T but no descent (intra-abdominal testis), male genitalia and persistence of Mullerian duct structures (large prostatic utricle, ejaculatory duct obstruction, midline prostate cysts, vestigial uterus, fallopian tubes and upper vagina)

- (ii) Failed production of T
 - Leydig cell aplasia
 - Failure of biosynthesis from cholesterol (e.g. 17-beta HSD deficiency)
- (iii) Failed production of DHT
 - 5-alpha reductase deficiency
 - Autosomal recessive defect in 5-AR gene (SRD5A2) on chromosome 2
 - Unknown incidence – highest in some Dominican Republic families
 - Undervirilised genetic males
 - Often presents as primary amenorrhoea in ‘female’ children
 - Testosterone surge at puberty leads to phallic enlargement and testis descent (“female to male syndrome”)
 - Rudimentary prostate development due to lack of DHT – never develop BPH or prostate cancer
- (iv) Androgen insensitivity syndrome
 - Previously testicular feminisation syndrome
 - Incidence 1:40,000
 - X-linked recessive: Mutation of androgen receptor located on long arm of chromosome X
 - Female phenotype with lower 2/3 blind-ending vagina, normal testis and Wolffian duct derivatives. Testis in labia, inguinal canal or abdomen
 - Presents with primary amenorrhoea or testis in inguinal hernia in female (vaginoscopy with confirmation of cervix recommended in all females with inguinal hernia)
 - Management
 - Orchidectomy
 - Female hormone replacement
 - Vaginal dilatation +/- vaginoplasty
 - Partial AIS a/w reduced numbers of AR or reduced affinity for T – Reifenstein’s syndrome

Evaluation of ambiguous genitalia

History

- Family history
- Pregnancy history (drugs or illness)

Examination

- Phallus size
- Location of urethra
- Labioscrotal folds
- Palpable testes*
- Pigmentation (ACTH)

Blood tests

- Karyotype
- 17-OH progesterone
- U&E

Imaging

- USS (gonads/mullerian duct remnant)
- Genitogram (urogenital sinogram)

Endoscopy

Laparoscopy

Pelvic laparotomy and gonadal biopsy

General approach to gender assignment

Delay assignment and birth registration until full evaluation

Once decided avoid ambiguous names

Typically

CAH feminising genitoplasty and female gender

AIS female phenotype – female gender

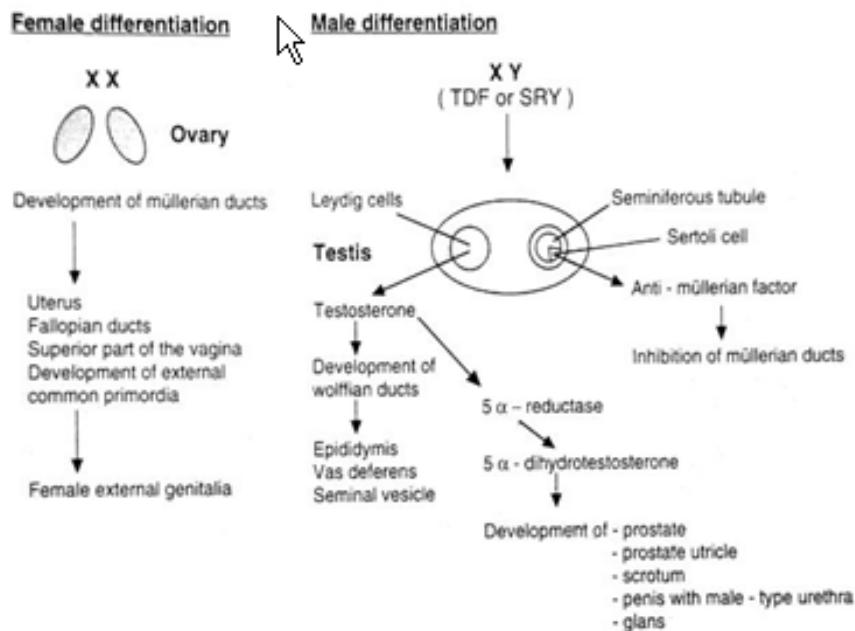
Male phenotype – male gender only if positive T stimulation test

However it appears that in almost all cases of AIS, patients 'think' like females due to T insensitivity in brain. Therefore female gender assignment is almost universal

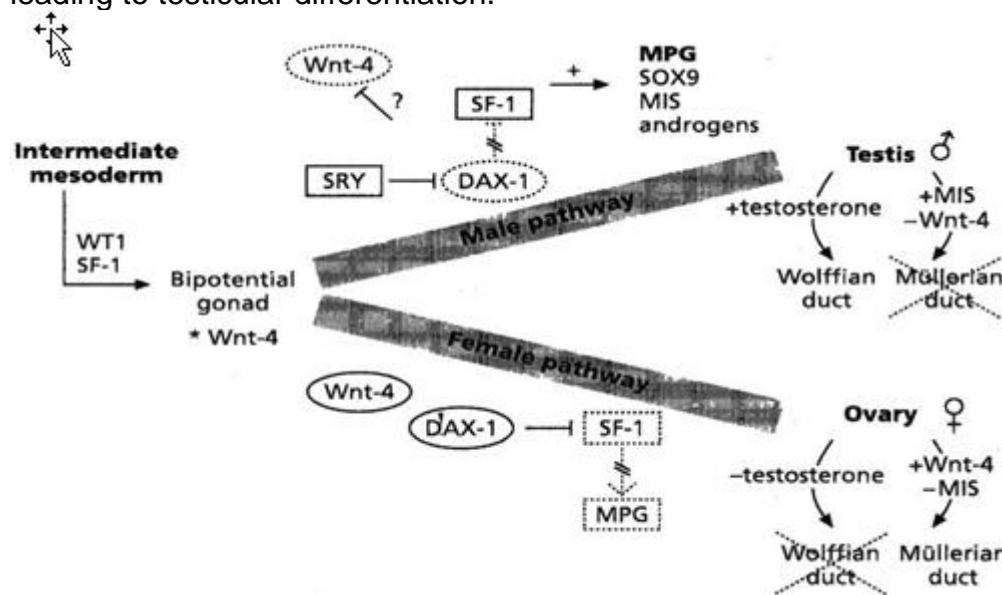
MGD depends on size of phallus

Appendix

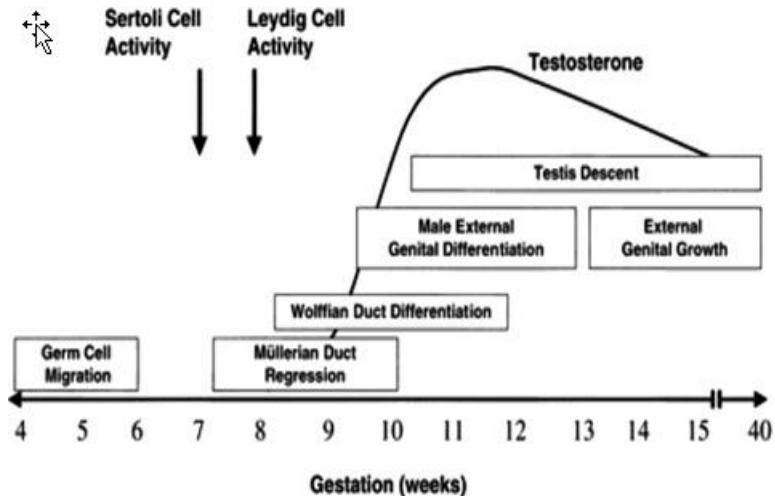
According to the Jost paradigm, three steps must occur for sexual differentiation: establishment of chromosomal sex at fertilization, which determines development of the undifferentiated gonads into testes or ovaries, and subsequent differentiation of the internal ducts and external genitalia as a result of endocrine functions associated with the type of gonad present (Jost et al, 1973).



Testis determining gene (SRY gene, aka TDF) located on short arm of Y chromosome. Downstream genetic cascade includes, SF1, SOX9 and mullerian inhibitory substance, with inhibition of DAX1 (X-related gene) and possibly WNT-4, leading to testicular differentiation.



Sertoli cell activity in differentiating testis leads to production of MIS. MIS responsible for stimulating Leydig cells to produce T and also guides first phase of testicular descent. T stimulates Wolffian duct development into epididymis, vas and seminal vesicles. Peripheral conversion of T to DHT by 5-alpha reductase leads to development of prostate and external genitalia.



As implied by Turner's syndrome, the presence of two functioning X chromosomes required for normal female differentiation – otherwise gonadal dysgenesis occurs

